

You'd think that after the illicit Pakistani nuclear sales to North Korea, Iran, and Libya, the U.S. and its allies would want to boost the rules on nuclear exports, especially for nuclear goods bound for Islamabad. But if you knew what Chinese, French, Japanese, and U.S. reactor vendors and energy officials were up to, you'd realize you were wrong.

Westinghouse in the U.S., Japan's Mitsubishi, and the French firm Areva are so eager to sell China nuclear-power plants that they and their governments are turning a blind eye to an even more troubling nuclear export — a Chinese deal to sell Islamabad a large reactor. This sale, revealed in the press last week, defies the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) guidelines — rules China says it wants to adhere to and that President Bush is anxious to bolster.

Saying nothing to protest this sale to Islamabad would confirm that the worst proliferators, such as Pakistan, can not only go Scot-free for their proliferating past, but also receive more nuclear technology without having to follow the rules. It's one deal that should be killed and could be if U.S. and allied officials made their own reactor sales to China contingent on Beijing renouncing its nuclear-reactor pledge to Pakistan.

Backers of the civilian nuclear industry, of course, see things differently. Pakistan and China, they note, are already nuclear-weapons states and China now says it will place its proposed reactor to Pakistan under International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards. Besides, the U.S. government has spent nearly a quarter of a billion dollars helping Westinghouse on its AP 1000 reactor design to make sure Beijing gets the reactors it needs. What nonproliferation concerns, they ask, could warrant blocking the sale?

There are three.

First, the U.S. and its allies can hardly sell China reactors and say nothing about Beijing's Pakistani reactor deal without making a hash of the NSG's guidelines and President Bush's own most recent nonproliferation proposals. On February 11, 2004, President Bush announced a series of initiatives that would put real teeth and backbone into the NSG. Under this organization's rules, no member is supposed to supply nuclear goods to any state unless the recipient is willing to open all of its nuclear facilities to full-scope IAEA inspections. President Bush not only backs this rule, but wants to toughen it by requiring NSG members to cut off nuclear sales to states that have refused to adopt the IAEA's latest, most stringent additional inspections protocol.

Pakistan, of course, has refused to allow the IAEA to inspect all but a handful of its nuclear facilities. China, meanwhile, proudly announced in January that it intends to become a member of the NSG (a step that U.S. officials undoubtedly encouraged China to take in anticipation of U.S. nuclear sales to it). China's pledge to sell Pakistan a large reactor, then,

could hardly be more obnoxious: It makes a mockery of the NSG, China's candidacy to become a member, President Bush's nonproliferation initiative, and nuclear restraint in general.

Second, letting these reactor sales proceed can only persuade Pakistani officials they are off the hook for behavior that has distinguished them as the worst nuclear proliferator since the advent of nuclear energy. Pakistan, in fact, has been cutting nuclear weapons deals with Libya, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and North Korea for a decade or more. A recent Central Intelligence Agency report leaked to the press pegs Pakistan's first nuclear dealings with North Korea to information exchanges that began in 1991.

U.S. officials clearly would like to learn more from Pakistan's proliferation mastermind Dr. Abdul Qadeer Khan. Unfortunately, Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf, who recently pardoned Khan for selling Pakistan's nuclear crown jewels, has kept U.S. officials from interviewing him. So far, the White House has put up with this. If, on top of this, the U.S. and its allies do nothing to block China's reactor sale to Pakistan, Islamabad will have reason to conclude that they are forgiven and need not cooperate any further.

Third, doing nothing to block China from selling Pakistan a new reactor will make it much more difficult to restrain nuclear sales to other nations. Pakistan, after all, needs another reactor like Iran needs its nuclear power plant at Bushehr and its uranium enrichment plants. Well-informed Pakistani critics have pointed out that the \$700 million reactor and its proposed location at Chashma raises major safety and economic concerns. Unfortunately, Islamabad has so far ignored the critics.

If Washington says nothing, it will only suggest Islamabad is right. This will set a horrendous precedent. Is there any country less qualified financially or in need of buying such a reactor, more able to convert the reactor's fresh or spent fuel quickly into bomb material, or freer of legal constraints to proliferate? (Pakistan, unlike most nations, has never signed the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty.) If we let this sale go without protest, how will we and our allies be able to say no to anyone else?

Secretary of State Colin Powell is scheduled to visit Islamabad before the end of this week. The urgent topic of Pakistan's nuclear-proliferation exports is sure to be on his agenda. To this he needs to add stopping Pakistan's planned reactor import from China. Certainly, Washington won't impress the Pakistanis about blocking the bomb's further spread if it lets this one go.

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